

Cloudland Hotel: Hotel history is fascinating

Some scattered rocks on top of Roan Mountain are all that is left of the Cloudland Hotel. Without a sign to mark the spot, it would be almost impossible to find.

Large rocks that once formed the hotel's foundation are now scattered around the Roan Bald, leaving no hint of any structure.

In its day, the hotel was a thriving resort in the middle of a desolate wilderness. When it was abandoned, the local people picked it clean, for once having some of the luxury it held in their own homes.

Jennifer Bauer worked as a ranger at Roan Mountain State Park for 21 years, and learned all she could about the old hotel, during that time. Her book, *Roan Mountain: A Passage of Time*, gives a detailed history of the place that once drew wealthy travelers from all over the world.

"I just found it fascinating," she said. "To think that a resort sat up there on top of that mountain."

Bauer said the hotel was probably built in the early 1880's, and remained for about 20 years. The hotel was built by Civil War Union General John T. Wilder.

Apparently Wilder operated iron mines in the area and kept the hotel as one of his many business ventures.

"He was very savvy," she said. "Evidently he was always looking for ways to make a little money."

And Wilder catered to people with lots of it. "It was a very high-class resort for the time," she said. "It had a putting green, nightly entertainment, and hundreds of rooms."

Guests had their meals in a central heating area. Large fireplaces kept them warm in the winter. They rode in carriages up through Carver's Gap and once at the hotel, rarely strayed far.

But the remote location that made it such an attraction eventually consumed it. Bauer said Wilder fell into bad health around the turn of the century and left the hotel in the hands of the caretaker.

"After that, it just fell into disrepair," she said. "People stopped going there, and it was eventually abandoned. Then people started taking parts of it away."

Bauer said Wilder's heir eventually sold the property to the U.S. Forest Service.

For some, it is a grim reminder that nothing is permanent. For others it is a monument of nature, showing that it will eventually reclaim all it once created.

“In a way I’m glad it is like it is,” Bauer said. “Even though I would have liked to have seen it standing.”

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